

SAFE SCHOOL AMBASSADORS[®]

THE PROBLEM: BULLYING AND VIOLENCE

Despite the best efforts of policymakers and educators, bullying has become a national crisis affecting schools across the U.S. Bullying has become younger, meaner, and more acceptable in youth culture. Young people exposed to bullying and violence are at a higher risk for detrimental health outcomes and low academic achievement. Each day in the U.S. more than 160,000 children stay home from school because they are afraid of being bullied. Nationally, 7,000 high school students drop out per day, and as many as 10% of these students report that it's because of bullying-related incidents. According to the U.S. Department of Education, each year as many as 900,000 secondary students are cyber-bullied by their peers, often with dire consequences.

THE SOLUTION: THE SAFE SCHOOL AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

Student bystanders are a critical and under-utilized resource for positively impacting the crisis of bullying in our schools. They see, hear, and know things adults don't, can intervene in ways adults can't and are often on the scene of an incident before an adult. The Safe School Ambassadors program (SSA) empowers student bystanders to *speaking up* and intervene with their peers in bullying-related incidents. Since 2000, this field-tested evidence-based model has equipped over **60,000** 4-12th grade students in **1000** schools in **32** states, **Canada**, **Guam** and **Puerto Rico** with the communication skills to prevent and stop emotional and physical bullying and improve school climate.

HOW THE SAFE SCHOOL AMBASSADORS PROGRAM WORKS

The program engages the socially-influential leaders of a school's diverse cliques. These "Alpha" leaders are carefully identified through student and staff surveys. They are selected based upon specific criteria, such as: strong position and influence in their peer group, good communication skills, and a history of standing up for friends. They participate in a two-day interactive training along with several adults who serve as program mentors. The training gives student Ambassadors the motivation and skills to resolve conflicts, defuse incidents, and support isolated and excluded students. After the training, small group meetings of Ambassadors are held every few weeks. These meetings, led by the adult mentors, provide time for strengthening skills, support data collection and analysis of Ambassador interventions, and help sustain student and adult commitment to the program.

RESULTS

Student Ambassadors average 2+ actions per week. During a school year, these individual actions often add up to more than **2,400** interventions, which impact the whole school. The results include:

- a) decreased incidents of bullying, harassment, cyber bullying, gang-related activities and other forms of mistreatment;
- b) increased attendance and academic performance;
- c) improved relationships among students; and,
- d) increased respect for diversity.

In 2010, a study of the SSA program (submitted to the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices and the California Healthy Kids Resource Center) found that: **SSA schools showed suspension rate decreases of 33%, while suspension rates at non-SSA control schools increased 10% in the same period.**

*When students observe the interventions of Ambassadors, they are motivated to take action and speak up; ultimately turning bystanders into “upstanders”. This shift creates a “ripple effect” that over time results in a “tipping point” that changes the schools’ social norms from **it’s cool to be cruel** to **it’s right to speak up**.*

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

- *“In the last 4 years since we launched the Safe School Ambassadors program we have had a 67% decrease in office referrals, an 84% decrease in detentions and an 85% decrease in suspensions.”*
Deborah Hall, Principal, Healdsburg Junior High School, Healdsburg, CA.
- *“Ambassador interventions have led to significant decreases in harassment and bullying, while contributing to fewer suspensions and even expulsions. The Safe School Ambassadors program improves overall school climate and decreases administrative time on discipline.”*
Dave Rose, Director of Student Services, Petaluma Joint Union High School District, Petaluma, CA.
- *“I am impressed with Community Matters’ innovative techniques for making schools safe. Know that I intend to use my voice and influence as the ranking Democrat on the House Committee on Education and the Workforce to bring attention to this very serious subject.”*
Lynn Woolsey, Member of Congress.

PROGRAM COSTS

The Safe School Ambassadors program costs approximately \$5,000 to launch at a school. This translates to about \$125 per student trained (about 40 students and 6-8 adults). Services provided include: pre- and post-training assistance, two-day training of students and staff, coaching support throughout the year, data collection tools, program materials including Principal Handbook, Program Advisor Handbook, Small Group Facilitator guides and Student guidebooks.

WHO IS COMMUNITY MATTERS

Community Matters is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Sebastopol, California. The organization is a national leader in bullying and violence prevention, whose mission is *“to collaborate with schools and communities in creating safe and inclusive environments where all youth and adults thrive.”* Community Matters’ programs and services create safer schools by empowering students, training staff and working closely with families and the community.

HOW TO LEARN MORE

Community Matters

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